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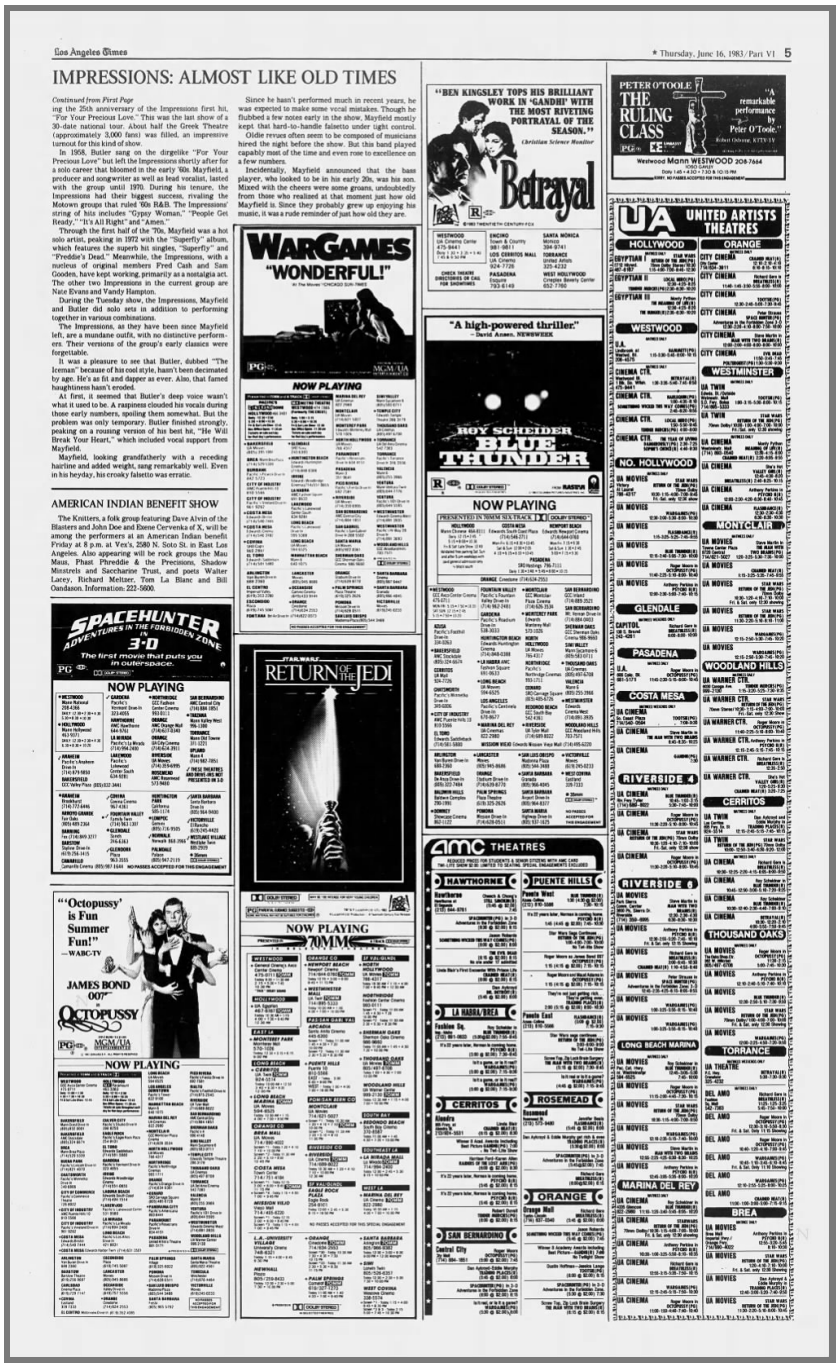

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IMPRESSIONS: ALMOST LIKE OLD TIMES

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ing the 25th anniversary of the Impressions first hit, "For Your Precious Love." This was the last show of a 30-date national tour. About half the Greek Theatre (approximately 3,000 fans) was filled, an impressive turnout for this kind of show.

In 1958, Butler sang on the dirgelike "For Your Precious Love" but left the Impressions shortly after for a solo career that bloomed in the early '60s. Mayfield, a producer and songwriter as well as lead vocalist, lasted with the group until 1970. During his tenure, the Impressions had their biggest success, rivaling the Motown groups that ruled '60s R&B. The Impressions' string of hits includes "Gypsy Woman," "People Get Ready," "It's All Right" and "Amen."

Through the first half of the '70s, Mayfield was a hot solo artist, peaking in 1972 with the "Superfly" album, which features the superb hit singles, "Superfly" and "Freddie's Dead." Meanwhile, the Impressions, with a nucleus of original members Fred Cash and Sam Gooden, have kept working, primarily as a nostalgia act. The other two Impressions in the current group are Nate Evans and Vandy Hampton.

During the Tuesday show, the Impressions, Mayfield and Butler did solo sets in addition to performing together in various combinations.

The Impressions, as they have been since Mayfield left, are a mundane outfit, with no distinctive performers. Their versions of the group's early classics were forgettable.

It was a pleasure to see that Butler, dubbed "The Iceman" because of his cool style, hasn't been decimated by age. He's as fit and dapper as ever. Also, that famed haughtiness hasn't eroded.

At first, it seemed that Butler's deep voice wasn't what it used to be. A raspiness clouded his vocals during those early numbers, spoiling them somewhat. But the problem was only temporary. Butler finished strongly, peaking on a rousing version of his best hit, "He Will Break Your Heart," which included vocal support from Mayfield.

Mayfield, looking grandfatherly with a receding hairline and added weight, sang remarkably well. Even in his heyday, his croaky falsetto was erratic.

Since he hasn't performed much in recent years, he was expected to make some vocal mistakes. Though he flubbed a few notes early in the show, Mayfield mostly kept that hard-to-handle falsetto under tight control.

Odile revues often seem to be composed of musicians hired the night before the show. But this band played capably most of the time and even rose to excellence on a few numbers.

Incidentally, Mayfield announced that the bass player, who looked to be in his early 20s, was his son. Mixed with the cheers were some groans, undoubtedly from those who realized at that moment just how old Mayfield is. Since they probably grew up enjoying his music, it was a rude reminder of just how old they are.

AMERICAN INDIAN BENEFIT SHOW

The Knitters, a folk group featuring Dave Alvin of the Blasters and John Doe and Exene Cervenka of X, will be among the performers at an American Indian benefit Friday at 8 p.m. at Vex's, 2580 N. Soto St. in East Los Angeles. Also appearing will be rock groups the Mau Maus, Phast Phreddie & the Precisions, Shadow Minstrels and Saccharine Trust, and poets Walter Lacey, Richard Meltzer, Tom La Blanc and Bill Oandason. Information: 222-5600.